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SUBJECT: PRES. TANDJA GREETS DIP CORPS; COMMENTS ON TERRORISM, UN DISAPPEARANCES, MINING, U.S. ADMINISTRATION

¶1. On January 13, President Tandja received the annual greeting of the diplomatic corps and offered his own remarks in return. His comments, a stocktaking of the past year, covered a wide range of subjects, ranging from thanking development partners for their assistance, the state of the economy, the mining sector, the recent disappearance of UN officials, the newly elected U.S. administration, and terrorism and smuggling.

¶2. The text of President Tandja's remarks is as follows (unofficial Embassy translation):

(Begin text)

Address of the President of the Republic in Response to the New Year Greetings from the Diplomatic Corps

Honorable Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honorable Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions,

Honorable Representatives of International Organizations,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although it may sound like a ritual, New Year greetings from the diplomatic corps remain full of symbols not only for your excellencies, distinguished representatives of countries and institutions, but also for myself, as we are working together to strengthen friendship and cooperation between our nations. Allow me therefore to avail myself of this unique opportunity to renew my availability and gratitude and express my strong desire to further consolidate these exemplary and fruitful relations in 2009. I would like to thank the honorable Dean of the Diplomatic Corps for his New Year greetings to the people, government, and institutions of the Republic and to me, as well as for the wishes of peace, prosperity, and continuous progress he expressed to Niger.

I would also like to convey my best wishes of health and happiness to you and your respective families, and of progress to the countries and institutions you are representing here in Niger. May 2009 give us the opportunity to achieve new objectives under cooperation programs signed with your respective countries and institutions, and to overcome, within the framework of a strengthened international solidarity, the numerous challenges facing the world today.

Fully mobilized and with a new sense of pride, the people of Niger, on its part, are giving a new and founding impetus to national construction efforts. At this crucial moment in history, increased support from our bilateral and multilateral partners will certainly be a powerful support and acceleration factor in the achievement of the major sustainable economic and social development objectives of Niger.

The testimony you have just given with regard to facts that have characterized this very important development recorded by our country, including the major actions carried out by the Government and people of Niger last year, is quite edifying. This is very

encouraging for us in our vision and the orientation we are giving to our efforts. Indeed, the celebration in total communion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic gave the entire people of Niger the opportunity to pay tribute to the women and men who invested their time and energy in the construction of the Republic.

This made it possible to take stock of what has been achieved and be convinced of the need to maintain national cohesion and synergy, which are indispensable for the implementation of all major projects and are crucial for the future of our country. As the Honorable Dean also pointed out, our democracy is steadily maturing and the existence of a dynamic civil society is the expression of the vitality of democratic life in Niger as well as a diversity of opinions that are expressed, which contribute to the national debate on national issues.

But, thanks to God, though this confrontation of ideas is necessary in every democratic society, it does not disrupt this peaceful climate, thanks to the commitment and sense of responsibility of all stakeholders, who promptly trusted various consultation frameworks that had been adequately put in place. The economic performance of Niger has also been highlighted in your address, Honorable Dean, and we will make every effort to further improve it through sound and efficient management of resources, due development program implementation, and merciless corruption control.

In addition, the benefits of this renewed growth have been distributed to all socio-professional groups through increased earnings, support to rural communities based on provision of agricultural inputs at reduced prices, and various social activities, as well as many other initiatives carried out in the framework of the Special Program, as you rightly recalled, Honorable

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Dean.

Our wish is to make the mining sector one of the key leverage points of this growth, which we hope will be sustained, sustainable, and more equitably shared. Therefore, resources we expect from this sector will be a priority used to develop agriculture, productive economic investments, and infrastructure with a view to consolidating our economic base. Accounting in the national budget is a bonus related to the signing of the mining agreement for the Agadem block with CNOOC, a Chinese company, which also translates our concerns to ensure a rational and transparent use of such resources in perfect harmony with our commitment as signatory of the Initiative on the Transparency of Extractive Industries.

On the diplomatic front, our presence on the sub-regional, African, and international scene was more remarkable and our positions have always been efficiently defended without any conflicts in all international forums. With both its traditional partners and other partners with whom relations are being developed, our country will continue working to develop mutually beneficial cooperation, based on our national aspirations and the vital interests of the nation.

Though the situation of our country may inspire optimism, this does not allow us to behave in a self-satisfactory and triumphant way. Indeed, we are firmly committed to overcome other challenges and continuously work with the international community to find general and specific responses to current issues. Among these challenges and concerns, I would like to mention: population growth and climate change phenomenon, the impacts of which we are aware of. With regard to the efforts deployed to reduce poverty, build peace and security, we remain open to all fellow countrymen who abandon unnecessary violence and who undertake to peacefully join the Republic.

However, the State will continue to shoulder all its responsibilities in the face of those who continue to undermine its security and ignore the appeals of the people of Niger. Allow me to say it once again: these armed bandits are these very terrorist groups involved in drug trafficking, arm smuggling, and human trafficking. By resorting exclusively to criminal activities and conveying selfish and dividing ideas that may undermine national unity, they have disqualified themselves in the eyes of the people

of Niger, who wish to live in peace, brotherhood, and harmony among all groups.

Concerning the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General in Niger and his colleagues, as well as their respective families who do not have any news about them and hope that they will be soon liberated, all investigations indicate that they are held hostage by these terrorist groups and their accomplices, as evidenced by their unclear statements that show a degree of confusion in the face of this irresponsible act.

Among these challenges and concerns, I wish to mention AIDS control and other pandemic diseases, although efforts so far deployed are beginning to bear fruit; as well as world food crisis that severely hit our populations in all countries and which may persist as long as world food production has not sufficiently increased to impact the market prices. As far as we are concerned, our support to rural producers will be further increased and the development of ponds and basins as well as irrigation in areas with such potential will be the top priority.

With regard to the severe energy crisis over the last months that has had negative impacts on economic activities; I may say that we are already on the right track. Through the large-scale ongoing program as well as the upcoming construction of the Kandadji dam and development of Salkadamna coal, adequate and sustainable solutions are now within reach.

The global economic crisis and recession that are impacting major economic powers worldwide will certainly have impacts on trade as a result of economic slowdown, on the one hand, and on assistance flows to developing countries, on the other hand. As a corollary, these countries attended the follow-up development financing conference held in Doha at the beginning of December 2008 with this anxiety in mind. It is our hope that the appeal launched by the UN Secretary General during the high level meeting on the development of Africa last September, calling on donors to translate into reality the commitments they made in Gleneagles in 2005 and make more efforts to double the volume of their assistance to Africa with view to bridging the gap in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, will be heard.

It is also our hope that the change that has occurred in the United States of America will promote new relations in the world, a more concerted approach to major issues, and a firmer commitment to peace and progress for all nations.

While this prospect raises hope in the entire world, the people of

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Palestine are once again victim of attacks from the State of Israel, which obstinately refuses to implement UN resolutions and support the relevant initiatives for comprehensive peace in this region. The response of the international community to this basic issue might actually give a hint of the possibility of creating this new world where justice, peace, and cooperation will have the upper hand on war, domination, and underdevelopment. In any case, we, as people in search of better living conditions, are hopeful.

On this note, I wish to reiterate, Honorable Dean of the diplomatic corps, Honorable Heads of Diplomatic and Consular Missions, and Your Excellencies the Representatives of International Organizations, my best wishes for the year 2009.

I thank you for your kind attention.

(End text)

¶3. Comment: President Tandja's remarks touch on several areas of interest - although no mention of either local or national elections anticipated for 2009 was made:

-- Politically, democracy is seen as continuing its development in Niger, with civil society singled out as an important element or expression of diverse opinions. On the part of governance, controlling corruption gained mention.

-- Economically, the mining sector is seen as providing shared leverage for sustained agricultural development and the construction of infrastructure, albeit it in a transparent manner. President Tandja pointed to the Kandadji Dam and the Salkadamna coal project as key infrastructure projects designed to help the country realize its objectives.

-- Socially, somewhat surprisingly, the President mentioned both population growth and climate change as important factors in Niger's growth. Less so were his citing continued efforts to address HIV/AIDS and pursue UN Millennium Development Goals.

-- Security-wise, President Tandja referred to the state of insecurity in the north as involving "armed bandits" who are "terrorist groups involved in drug trafficking, arm smuggling, and human trafficking" who carry out "criminal activities" and "undermine national unity." Concerning the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General and his colleagues, President Tandja stated that "all investigations indicate that they are held hostage by these terrorist groups and their accomplices, as evidenced by their unclear statements that show a degree of confusion in the face of this irresponsible act."

-- Finally, President Tandja's singling out political change in the United States came as a surprise. In addition to holding the possibility of promoting new relations in the world, he welcomed "a more concerted approach to major issues, and a firmer commitment to peace and progress for all nations" by the United States.

ALLEN